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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSUL 000019

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 2/21/2016

TAGS: PREL PINS PINT PGOV PHUM I2

SUBJECT: NINEWA SCIRI REP CLAIMS KURDS NOT SUPPORTIVE OF AL JAAFARI NOMINATION BECAUSE OF KIRKUK ISSUE

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REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C). Nineva Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution of Iraq (SCIRI) Spokesman Aref Yousef claimed that recent personal attacks against Shia coalition nominee and current Prime Minister Ibrahim Al Jaafari as unjust and motivated by Kurds. Yousef accused Kurds of working against Al Jaafari because he did not interpret Article 58 (of the TAL) to cede control of Kirkuk to Iraqi Kurdistan. He said as a result Kurds were working with Sunni Arabs and secularists, such as Ayad Allawi, to "block" the selection of Al Jaafari for a second term. Yousef trumpeted last year's passing of the constitution and anti-insurgency efforts in Tal Afar as successes that should be directly attributed to Al Jaafari. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) PRT Poloff met with Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution of Iraq (SCIRI) provincial spokesman Aref Yousef in Mosul on February 19.

KURDS BEHIND ATTACKS ON AL JAAFARI FOR "SELFISH" REASONS

¶3. (C) SCIRI spokesman Yousef said although Al Jaafari's first term was not a complete success, most of the allegations against him have been exaggerated. He claimed Kurds are upset over the Shia Coalition's nomination of Al Jaafari because the prime minister did not "give them Kirkuk." Yousef said Kurds preferred a very liberal interpretation of Article 58 in the TAL regarding issues of the displaced, and as a result had their "eyes on Kirkuk." However, Yousef said, Al Jaafari "did not yield" on the issue. He said other non-Kurd areas of the country, such as Salahadin province, should also be looked at since they, too, were affected by Saddam Hussein's tinkering. He recommended that Al Jaafari be commended for not ceding to pressure from the Kurds on this issue.

CRITICISM OF AL JAAFARI UNFAIR

¶4. (C) Yousef said criticism of Al Jaafari is unfair. He claimed Al Jaafari's tenure should also be viewed in relation to the government he "inherited from [Ayad] Allawi." Yousef

claimed Al Jaafari received a deteriorating infrastructure and fallout from terrorists attacks in Fallujah and Najaf. He said Al Jaafari was not in office long enough to address all of the issues that he wanted to, since the term was less than one year.

Yousef claimed Al Jaafari's work with Sunni Arab tribal leaders in Al Anbar province, for example, helped solve security issues there. He claimed Al Jaafari reacted "very level-headed" when dealing with anti-insurgency issues in Tal Afar in September of last year. Yousef said Al Jaafari "could have overreacted" at the news that "200,000 Shias" were killed or displaced. Instead, said Yousef, Al Jaafari took time to develop a plan to settle security problems there. Yousef claimed that the successes with the writing and passing of the constitution, and a peaceful national election, should be credited to Al Jaafari as well.

SUPPORT FOR AL JAAFARI'S NOMINATION

¶ 15. (C) When questioned whether SCIRI members were disappointed that their candidate, Dr. Abdul Al Mahdi, lost the nomination by one vote, Yousef preferred not to answer the question directly. He said he hoped Al Mahdi would have been nominated since he is "very qualified and skillful," and had a record of "bringing people together." Yousef claimed, however, that the process was fair and therefore should be respected. Yousef responded to recent claims by Sunni Arab, secular, and Kurdish parties that they would seek to block the nomination of Al Jaafari as "unlikely." He said even if Kurds work with former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi to oppose the selection of Al Jaafari, such a move could push the political process back and delay the formation of the new government. Yousef said SCIRI hopes that the new government would be inclusive and work for the benefit of the Iraqi people. He said he hopes future elections do not digress along sectarian and tribal lines.

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PROVINCIAL ELECTION PREPARATIONS

¶ 16. (C) Yousef said he did not expect provincial elections to take place before this coming September. He said that once the new government was set then preparations would move forward for the provincial elections. Yousef said SCIRI had mobilized its offices in Mosul, Sinjar, Tal Afar, and Telkaif, but that it had no nominees to date.

COMMENT

¶ 17. (C) Yousef maintained a cautious attitude, especially because his party's candidate, Al Mahdi, lost by a razor-thin margin. He toed the party line, however, on building up Al Jaafari's first term as prime minister, but did hint that he did not believe the Shia coalition had picked the best candidate for the job. He appeared to be dreading the possibility as well that Al Jaafari's nomination might not go through, which would push the process back to square one. Yousef was adamant that the Kurds were responsible for the "anti-Jaafari" movement because of their "selfish" motivations over Article 58 and the Kirkuk issue. We could sense from this meeting that Yousef and other local SCIRI members and politicians will be spending much of their time working on damage control from Al Jaafari nomination, rather than concentrating on their work in the new national assembly.

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